

“Let’s Partake: Called to...”

“Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’”

It is a simple invitation which Jesus extends to his disciples in John’s post resurrection account. In the midst of their darkness, with haunting memories of the cross, the violent death they witnessed, and seeming defeat and despair, comes the invitation of the Living, Resurrected Lord.

It is an invitation that remains as vital today as it has ever been! Out of the crucible of this moment of history, Jesus invites us to sit down and eat with him and then extend the table to all of our neighbors. When the meal ends, we are sent into the world to minister and serve without prejudice or judgment.

But the meal to which Jesus invited the disciples, and now invites us, is no ordinary meal... It is a:

- 1) Meal of radical obedience to the Lordship of Christ
- 2) Meal of Communion with Christ, our Living Lord and Savior, and
- 3) Meal of commissioning to serve all persons who are to be reconciled to God through Christ.

- 1) This is a Meal of Radical Obedience to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The disciples in the John 21 passage were undoubtedly discouraged. Jesus had died on the cross, and the disciples, not knowing what to do, decide to go fishing...to return to a living they know quite well. Simon Peter leads the way by proclaiming “I am going fishing.” And the rest follow along.

Further deepening their frustration, when these expert fishermen went out in the boat that night, they caught nothing. Have you ever experienced empty nets as a result of your labor? Investing so much of yourself. Nothing you try yields a result ... (Pause and giving them time to identify and reflect. Nodding your head)

But somehow out of those most desolate moments of life, you find Christ in your midst. At that very moment, out of the crucible of defeat, Jesus arrives.

When I lived in Wichita, a group of us met regularly for Bible study and spiritual growth. One book we engaged was Thomas Moore's book *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*.

Moore explores "transcendent function" which he describes as "a point of view that embraces the mysterious depths of the soul as well as conscious understanding and intention." The soul's growth most frequently comes from un-expected places. It comes first from living close to the heart, and not at odds with it. Paradoxically, soul growth and strength may emerge from failure, depression, and loss. What this suggests is that the soul itself appears and develops in the gaps and holes of life's experience. Sometimes soul work is an "opus contra naturam, a work against nature that cannot be fully explained or recreated by another person."

This study group brought a new focus to my life's soul work and began resolving my own inner conflict in the war between culturalization and faith in the resurrected Christ. It was preparatory work for difficult times in life, and it breathed into me the very breath of renewal through God's spirit.

This soulful exploration was put to the test several years ago, in the first few days after I fell from a ladder in our garage. The injuries were serious! I remember little of the first two days, but in the margins of those days, in the unexpected spaces of life, I recall my soul venturing into the presence of our loving God.

In those margins I found a release from the burdens, anxiety and decisions I was facing. I had to choose either to be a victim of these injuries and accept whatever fate would deal, or to fully engage the journey each day and affect the outcome. It was as a moment of absolute clarity – I chose engaging the journey in full partnership with life!

In the case of the disciples, this is their journey's turning point. In a fishless night, a figure appears on the shore, saying, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answer, "No."... He says to them, "Cast your net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some."

Now, what could be so compelling that a group of experienced fishermen would abandon their own tried and true skill sets, to follow the instructions of an unknown soul standing on the distant shore? They could have said, "What do you know about fishing?" But they didn't do that. Rather, they cast their net and the outcome was phenomenal!

And the disciple who Jesus loved, probably John, says to Peter, "This is the Lord." Their awakening to Jesus' presence was discovered in the act of **RADICAL OBEDIENCE TO HIS COMMANDS**, as they worked closest to their hearts in a moment of "opus contra naturam."

2. This is a Meal of Communion with Christ, our Living Lord & Savior.

When the disciples came to shore, Jesus invited them to put some of their fish on the already made fire and to "Come and have

Breakfast.” The writer notes the significance of the fact that **not one** of the disciples dared question who he was, for they knew it was the Lord.

John records, “Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.”

What a moment as the mystery of God’s love and grace fell upon the disciples. It was a moment of celebration, not out of their own strength, but because they yielded themselves to the power of the Living Lord and transformed despair into hope. A Christ moment!

This is the Christ moment for us! He meets us where we are, and invites us to come and partake of His body and blood as emblems of His sacrifice upon the cross and His overcoming death.

These past months have been very difficult for us as a church, haven’t they? Be honest... we’ve experienced moments in which we could have chosen to give up and walk away from each other, or to be reconciled to God and to each other through Christ. By choosing reconciliation, we would be making a bold statement of radical Christ-like discipleship as we also live into an “opus contra naturam” as church. . . . Think about it. Valuing unity over uniformity and saying “no” to the culture of conflict, hatred, and violence that seeks to divide us. This declaration would be seen as contrarian and noticed as evidence for all people, that the Earth will be filled with the intimate awareness of God’s beauty, as the water covers the seas as we yield ourselves to the living lord who moves us from the love of law to the law of love!

At last year’s National Youth Conference, Jarrod McKenna shared that people all around the world desperately want to experience the

gospel narrative of the Anabaptist/Pietist tradition which we Brethren take so for granted. Jarrod proclaimed to our youth that

“the peace church tradition reminds us that it’s not about individuals, it’s about a people: a people in community, a people who have a new imagination, a people who because of the way God has loved in sending his son, have been baptized and immersed into a different story. A people who have lived out into the midst of this different story in the craziness of our world in this moment. And people all around the world want in with you! Don’t you get it?”

Jarrod quoted to me on several occasions from Stuart Murray’s book, *The Naked Anabaptist*. Murray clarifies the Christ moment for the Brethren:

“We realize that we are followers of Jesus in a divided and violent world, and we are utterly realistic about the evil that lurks in the hearts of our fellow human beings – and in our own hearts – and spills out in acts of terrible violence. Because we are followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and we choose to believe that his way of nonviolent love is ultimately more realistic than embracing violence. Whether or not nonviolent alternatives are effective in the short term, or even the medium term, peace churches are signs of the coming kingdom of God. We choose to align ourselves with the future in which God is leading history.”

In these powerful moments we witnessed an affirmation of our faith by an outsider. Jarrod’s words authenticate the gospel narrative in

which we Brethren have been steeped as relevant and vital to this day and time. We witnessed our youth being deeply moved by God's spirit.

The same affirmation happens for us each time we participate in the Lord's Supper, feet washing, the Agape meal, and the Bread and Cup. It is a moment of recommitment, that not out of our own strength, but out of the power of the Living Lord among us, we move forward into an ever present and emerging narrative.

Brethren, let us partake.

3 Finally, this is a meal of commissioning.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" Peter replied, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." Jesus asks the question and gives the command 3 times.

In his exchange of questioned love and loyalty, Jesus commissions Peter to return home, to live his life with focus in ministry and service. In the same way, each of us is commissioned to leave here and return home as disciples ready to serve in the reconciling of people with God and people with each other. Christ is to be revealed and glorified in the manner of our living.

It is my prayer that we leave this conference blessed and challenged. From Wheeling, West Virginia, John Kline said, "I feel like saying to the Brethren everywhere that now is the time to sow the pure seeds of Gospel Truth . . . If this be not done, tares will sure to grow and multiply where the wheat of holy love should abound."

We have been inspired during our time together at Annual Conference by the ministry and service of radical, compassionate disciples of Christ from around the world. We have heard their stories as they seek to transform the people of this world into a likeness of God's kingdom come; God's will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

We have a commission to "another way of living," whereby we CONTINUE THE WORK OF JESUS. PEACEFULLY. SIMPLY. TOGETHER.

Just as Alexander Mack stepped out in faith to alter the narrative story for that small community of 8, we are similarly called to engage the narrative journey of this church. The next chapter of this church's story can only be written by you and me. In response to Christ's invitation to eat with him, "Let's partake, for we are called to..."

I believe, that:

In our responding, we will live in radical obedience to our
Master,

In our responding, we will celebrate moments of Communion

In our responding, we will meet Christ in the least of these.

BRETHREN, LET US PARTAKE and engage in the lives of our neighbors, as the servants of the Basin, and the towel.

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